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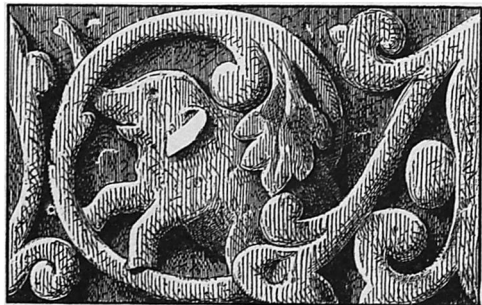
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## NATURE IN ART.

By F. EDWARD HULME, F.L.S., F.S.A.

A SERIES OF ARTICLES—NUMBER SEVEN.

In India we find several phases of art, for, though we naturally think of the land as a whole, it is a gathering together of many kingdoms, and is under the influence of several forms of religious belief; and it is really no more reasonable to expect to find the art of India alike throughout its vast area, than to expect the art of London



and Constantinople, or Madrid and Moscow, to be identical. Mohammedan architecture traveled into India from the west, but it assumes more graceful forms in India than in Persia or elsewhere. In many works distinctly Mohammedan, Hindu forms, both decorative and constructional, are introduced; and similarly in many parts of India we find Hindu buildings adopting, with more or less success, Mohammedan types of decoration and construction, there being something in common in their fundamental ideas which allows of this blending. At the same time each has its distinctive character, and in most cases this is decisively enough marked. The Mohammedan prohibition against the representation of any living thing is as binding in the sultry plains of Hindustan as in the orange groves of Grenada, or by the banks of the Nile; while the polytheistic character of the religion of the followers of Vishnu and Siva, reflects itself in their work no less, and covers their temples with the carvings of countless divinities. Buddhist art again has its easily recognizable peculiarities; the creed is a far purer one than either of the others we have named, and their work has a solid grandeur that is very striking. The Hindus have shown a very admirable power of forming a style, working it with great variety of treatment and great beauty of detail. One of its most marked pecu-

liarities is the profusion of decoration. Every surface is so lavishly carved with conventional floral forms, with animals, or the representations of their many deities, that we really feel that the very amount is a drawback, and that the whole would gain immensely in effect if the value of contrast, in the form of occasional bands of plainer surface, had been understood. The attributes of the gods are often so peculiar, that their representations are necessarily often very conventional; but the animal forms introduced are generally very well expressed. The elephant is often freely used, possibly from a sense of its value and a tribute to its intelligence and power, but more often, probably, as a symbol of Ganesa, their god of wisdom, who is ordinarily represented in human form, but with the head of an elephant. We give an example, above, from a piece of Hindu sculpture.

In the art of China the forms are ordinarily very conventional, most of them being of a very exaggerated type. The dragon is the form most freely met with, and, vividly as some of the mediæval sculptors and illuminators may have conceived such monsters, their ideas sink into insignificance by the side of the tremendous creations of the Celestials. When we cross the narrow sea that divides China from Japan, we at once find ourselves in an entirely different art-world.

Instead of a reliance upon their own morbid imagination and the grotesque phantasy that springs from a perverted ingenuity, we find an intense admiration for nature, and the highest qualities of drawing and coloring are exhibited in the treatment of birds, animals, and the human figure. In the depicting of these in all their variety of movement consists the great strength of the Japanese draughtsman, and the invariable truth of drawing and color proves that this small and, until lately, isolated nation possesses an artistic power that no nation on earth, with all the aid of museums, schools of art, government grants, and all the rest of it, can excel. It is the intense appreciation of the life-habits of the creatures, and his evident delight both in his own work and in theirs, which gives the Japanese this high position and pre-eminent skill. If we study, for example, their drawings of fish, we find them in every possible attitude, and with all the grace and undulation of nature. No western work gives us such a sense of the changeable nobility of the creatures as we may find on some cheap paper fan or other trifle, and where they give us a shoal there is no dull repetition, but each in the midst of the common action has an individuality of its own. The birds are equally beautiful. The spreading out of the feathers of the wings in flight, the countless modifications of line assumed during flight, their soaring flight, are all given in a way that excites our warmest admiration. All is admirably suited to decoration in the way it is treated; yet the force and freedom, the absolute fidelity to nature in the whole, is a constant delight, and the simplest Japanese object shows this enjoyment of nature in its degree as thoroughly as the most profusely ornamented and costly, while another remarkable characteristic is the simplicity of the means employed. A few bold lines, or half a dozen vigorous sweeps of the brush, suffice to give the most life-like impression. We have before us, as we write, a representation of two men wrestling, and we have no less than eighteen stages in the struggle between them shown, each being perfectly distinct from all the rest, and all equally full of power and vigor. If any of our readers want to

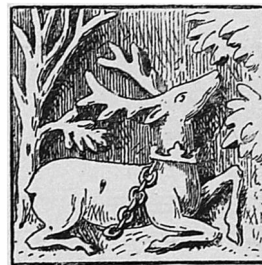
realize to the full what a mastery of action and expression this implies, let them get a pencil and piece of clean paper and try eighteen for themselves. Another quaintly delightful drawing deals with the very simple incident of a man proposing to carry a bale of goods on his shoulder; and here again we get nine perfectly distinct drawings, dating from the time he first lays hold of it on the ground till he marches triumphantly off with his load, the intermediate drawings showing the trouble he had to get a good grip of it, and the various ways he tried of carrying be-

fore he hit on the right one. Japanese art is now fashionable, and we may but seem to be joining in the general applause and swimming with the stream. We can therefore only say that our admiration is a thing of no recent date. We must bear in mind, too, that this popular applause, though in some cases of little or no critical value, springs from the true estimation first expressed by those whose opinions were really worth regarding, and this esteem will remain when the votaries of mere fashion will have deserted Japan and all its ways, and raised another idol on the empty throne: for the art of these people is no dead thing, but a vital force instinct with appreciation of all the beauty and quaintness of nature. Technically, too, these people can draw; they have both the observant and appreciative eye, and the ready hand; no complexity of structure, no sharp fore-shortening is shirked by them, and all the beauty that their eyes delight in, their hands transfer unflinchingly to paper.

We have thus devoted much space to a consideration of the use of animal forms in the ornaments and arts of various peoples, as the Egyptians, Assyrians, Greeks, Japanese, etc., but time forbade our dealing with European examples, and to these we now turn our attention.

The earliest monuments, such as the stone circles and avenues of Stonehenge, Avebury and

Brittany are without ornamental device at all, but some of the later monuments of these comparatively early days, such as the stone crosses of Ireland and the work done under Celtic and Runic influence, is characterized by an elaborate carving of interlacing lines or band. These are often suggestive of ropes or straps, but at other times we find them roughly formed into the likeness of entwining snakes or dragons. These serpentine or draconic forms are very largely found in the wonderful Celtic MSS., such books as that of Kells being a perfect storehouse of wonderfully intricate design. As we pass on to the Norman or 12th century style of art we find a very considerable use made of these forms, but other animals, as dogs, birds, and so forth, also begin to appear. The practical reason for this probably was that it was quickly found that an animal of this kind was not only a great deal easier to carve than the mass of involved interlacing lines, but that it was also considerably more effective when done. Grotesque heads were occasionally used in the Norman buildings, but these became much more common as the style passed into the Gothic. The Gothic carvers delighted both in nature and in the grotesque, some of their designs being of the most homely character. In one of the capitals, for instance, at Wells Cathedral we find amidst the foliage an old woman freeing her foot from a thorn. There are some other capitals in the same cathedral, all equally homely in tone, and passing almost imperceptibly from the picturesque to the ludicrous; a good example of the former may be seen in the



woodman proceeding to his labors. Over his shoulder he carries axe and provision wallet, while his costume, heavy boots and thick gloves, all give character and truth to the figure. Animals are sometimes introduced in the carvings, but not so commonly as foliage; in England there is perhaps less use of animal forms than abroad. During the 14th and 15th centuries heraldry was at its highest degree of excellence and influence, and its devices appear freely on the carvings of tombs, in metalwork and in all the brilliant colors of the stained glass of the cathedrals, municipal buildings, and stately castles of the nobility. Many of the forms employed by the herald were very conventional in character, some, as the Wyvern and cockatrice, wholly so; yet the rampant lions, stags, bears, eagles, and the like were the least suggestive of nature. As an example of this we give an illustration of the badge of King Richard II. from the carving in Westminster Hall. He had other devices as well, but this would appear to have been his favorite, the white hart, and to this day the influence is felt throughout England in the countless signs of "the White Hart" for hotels and houses of call. This badge occurs eighty-three times in Westminster Hall, yet so great was the fertility of invention of the old carver than in a thing permitting apparently of so little variation, no two are alike. Many of the flooring tiles, too, are heraldic in character, though others, as in the case of the one we figure, seem to introduce these natural forms for the pure pleasure in them. Our example is from a French source; there is a bold simplicity and conventionalism of treatment that is very attractive and striking; had the birds been more naturally treated we should have resented the formal breast-to-breast treatment; and yet this formality of treatment suited the purpose better in its symmetrical balance than any irregularity would have done. Our last illustration, the combat between the lion and the dragon, is also from a mediæval source. As the late Gothic or Tudor died



away into the abomination of the Elizabethan, the forms of nature passed out of use, and gave place to scrolls, cartouches and much else that was meaningless, so we feel that we can pass at once from this to the Renaissance, that period of exaggerated foliage enlarging upon, perhaps, but still retaining the beauty of nature and natural forms.